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Coldwater Creek, West Lake Landfill Activists Meet with Sen. Claire McCaskill's Office

The group Skyped with the senator's Washington DC office from its University City campaign office. But they also want to meet with EPA officials

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By Candace Jarett

[It's something those who say they are dealing with the effects of growing up or living surrounded by nuclear contamination and radioactive waste](#) are struggling to get closer to: federal attention to what is, and has been taking place in North County.

Federal Political Attention

But Dawn Chapman, a stay-at-home mom and resident turned advocate for change, said a few steps forward have been taken. She along with other people who grew up or currently live in North County near Coldwater Creek, the EPA's Superfund site West Lake Landfill or any other U.S. Army Corps of Engineers radioactive waste remediation sites in Hazelwood and Berkeley, had an opportunity to [Skype with Sen. Claire McCaskill's office](#) on May 7. She said the meeting went better than expected with Gary Gorsky, McCaskill's legislative assistant; and Mark Fowler, her legislative correspondent.

"A group of us went to her office in Delmar and took part in a video conference with two members of her staff in Washington," she said. "The main goal of our meeting was so show the lack of communication from the EPA to this community and to forcefully urge the federal government to step in and ask that control of West Lake Landfill be handed over to FUSRAP so that remediation of this site can start as soon as possible."

Calls to McCaskill's office were not returned as of article run time.

Chapman also said she asked the senator's office to help expedite getting EPA data from an from an [Airborne Spectral Photometric Environmental Collection Technology](#) (ASPECT) plane flyover that recently occurred on and around Coldwater Creek, as well as West Lake Landfill.

ASPECT is a small aircraft EPA uses to detect and gather chemical and radiological data.

Emails to the EPA were not returned at the time this article published.

But Matt Jefferson with the [EPA's Region 7 Division](#), which manages Superfund and environmental concerns for all of Missouri, said in April the results of the flights would be ready mid-May.

Chapman said she would like for a proper risk assessment be completed that shows what the potential threats are if the [fire that is burning under the Bridgeton Landfill comes into contact with radioactive material](#).

"We've been begging for a meeting with the EPA since the fire started getting out of control," she said. "We've got a lot of questions for them, and we're getting a little tired of asking nicely."

"They are the ones that hold the answers to West Lake."

Chapman says the next step is getting West Lake away from the EPA and into the Army Corps of Engineers hands, and possibly removing the waste from the area.

"We were blessed to be joined by members of [Coldwater Creek \(movement\)](#) and together we asked that [Senator Claire McCaskill](#) help in the process of getting our communities classified as "down winder" communities," she said. "We have all been living down wind of nuclear weapons waste from the Manhattan Project."

What is a Downwinder Community?

The term downwinders refers to individuals and communities who are exposed to radioactive contamination or nuclear fallout from atmospheric or underground nuclear weapons testing, and nuclear accidents. Chapman said McCaskill's office seem to have some concerns.

"They seemed receptive to the fact that the EPA has not done its job reaching out to the community and making sure that the new data on West Lake reaches the necessary state and local government agencies," she said.

[Dawn Chapman said she also met with Sen. Roy Blunt](#)'s office reiterating the same concepts and terms.

What is the contamination?

The [Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program](#) (FUSRAP) began in 1974 to identify, investigate and clean up or control sites through the United States that had become contaminated from the nation's early atomic weapons and energy programs during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Activities were performed by the Manhattan Engineer District (The Manhattan Project), or under the Atomic Energy Commission, prior to the Department of Energy

being formed.

As a part of these projects, the U.S. government contracted the Mallinckrodt Chemical Company to use its downtown facility to extract uranium from ore so it could be sent to other facilities. The extracted uranium was then sent to other facilities for enrichment. This occurred from 1942-1957. The program covers multiple sites in the St. Louis area both in St. Louis County and in St. Louis City.

The [St. Louis Downtown Site](#) (SLDS) is the source of the radioactive material. This location is where Mallinckrodt processed uranium for the U.S. government nuclear weapons complex. It was a 45-acre active chemical manufacturing facility located just 300 feet west of the Mississippi River.

The nuclear weapons' waste materials were stockpiled at several sites in North St. Louis County including at [Lambert-St. Louis International Airport](#). This site became known as the St. Louis Airport Site (SLAPS).

In the 1960s and 1970s, some of the waste material was sold to a private company, which transported the material to another location north of the SLAPS, and on Latty Avenue in the [City of Hazelwood](#). This site became known as the Hazelwood Interim Storage Site (HISS).

Together, the North County FUSRAP site consists of the SLAPS, HISS and 78 vicinity properties known as SLAPS VPs. The U.S. Department of Energy was responsible for the remediation of the FUSRAP sites from the late 1970s until 1998. At that time the [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#) (USACE) became the lead on the project.

Parts of Coldwater Creek are also a SLAPS Vicinity property. The creek has been affected by runoff from the FUSRAP sites. Coldwater Creek passes through several north St. Louis County communities including Florissant, Hazelwood, Black Jack and Spanish Lake. It was contaminated with uranium, thorium and radium.